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INFO RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 9811  
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE 3553  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5293  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2527  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 1287  
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SUBJECT: TOKYO MEDIA REACTION - HEALTH OF DPRK LEADER  
KIM JONG IL AND 9/11 ANNIVERSARY

11. LEAD STORIES: All Thursday morning papers gave prominent front-page coverage to the official kickoff yesterday of the LDP presidential election, with most saying that party Secretary General Aso appears to have support from almost half of the party's Diet members.

12. "What Is Going on in North Korea?" On growing speculation about the health of DPRK leader Kim Jong Il, the business-oriented Nikkei editorialized (9/11): "Factors other than health problems, such as the stalemate on the nuclear front, could explain his absence from the national foundation ceremonies.... As serious food shortages have been reported, Kim Jong Il may have concluded that his participation in the events would be inappropriate. The prevailing view is that no successor to Kim has been chosen yet, and prejudging the situation would not be advisable. However, if something serious is taking place inside North Korea, it will eventually directly affect Japan's security. It is necessary to closely monitor the situation in North Korea."

13. "Serious Concern Marks 60th National Foundation Day" The liberal Asahi wrote in an editorial (9/11): "What would be most desirable would be for North Korea to move toward full-fledged reform and opening. This would carry risks, however.... The most realistic approach would be to use the six-party talks to have North Korea surrender its nuclear program and sincerely deal with the abduction issue, while the U.S. and Japan would in return normalize diplomatic ties. Though it will be difficult, engineering a 'soft landing' for North Korea is the only option. A change of power will occur sooner or later regardless of the current health of Kim Jong Il. Policy toward the DPRK needs to be crafted with this in mind."

14. "Toward a New Cold War - U.S. Crusade to Spread Democracy Backfires with Russia" A Washington correspondent for the liberal Mainichi wrote (9/11): "Concern is mounting within the international community about the lack of means to restrain Russia. However, the Bush administration appears not to share that concern. It instead appears to be driven to spread liberty and democracy throughout the world.... The world is currently shifting from U.S. dominance to a more multipolar situation. The U.S. understands that working together with Russia on such common interests as the war on terrorism, Iran's nuclear program, and Middle East peace is critically important. Nevertheless, Washington has chosen to take a hard line against Russia and hold firm to what it considers its own values. This decision reflects U.S. frustration with the loss of its influence and prestige, which are necessary to achieve a breakthrough."

ZUMWALT